

9-27-2019

University of Dayton establishes Roger Brown residency in social justice, writing, and sport; Selects Wil Haygood as inaugural resident

University of Dayton

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/news_rls

Recommended Citation

University of Dayton, "University of Dayton establishes Roger Brown residency in social justice, writing, and sport; Selects Wil Haygood as inaugural resident" (2019). *News Releases*. 11282.
https://ecommons.udayton.edu/news_rls/11282

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Marketing and Communications at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in News Releases by an authorized administrator of eCommons. For more information, please contact mschlangen1@udayton.edu, ecommons@udayton.edu.

UNIVERSITY OF
DAYTON NEWS

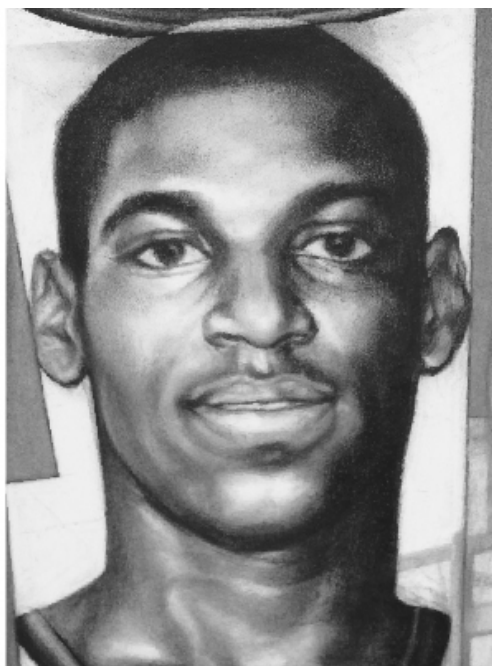
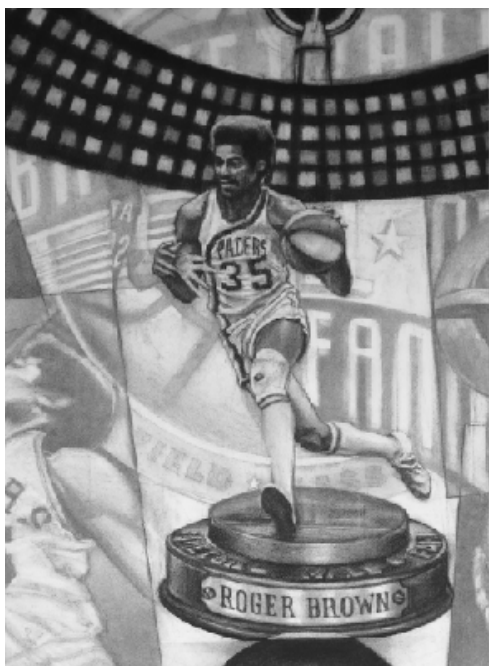
NEWS ARCHIVE

FOR THE MEDIA

News

News

/ University of Dayton establishes Roger Brown residency in social justice, writing, and sport; Selects Wil Haygood as inaugural resident



CONTACT

News and
Communications
Staff

[Email](#)

FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 27, 2019

University of Dayton establishes Roger Brown residency in social justice, writing, and sport; Selects Wil Haygood as inaugural resident

The University of Dayton today announced celebrated author Wil Haygood has been named to a new writer's residency honoring stand-out professional basketball player and former UD student Roger Brown, which will explore the intersection of sports and social justice.

[Haygood](#), recently named a finalist for the Dayton Literary Peace Prize, will serve a three-day residency Nov. 5-7, teaching classes, lecturing and engaging with students, faculty and staff in the [first Roger Brown Residency in Social Justice, Writing, and Sport](#). Slated to become an annual event, the residency will bring to campus distinguished writers who will explore the intersections of athletics, literature and justice.

"As a Catholic, Marianist university, we are actively concerned with social justice, and sports historically have reflected societal attitudes, both positively in celebrating achievement and negatively around issues of prejudice and discrimination," said University President Eric F. Spina.

"Writers have a special role in uncovering and telling the stories of those who have struggled to create a more just society and helping us understand better those places and moments in time where those struggles intersect with sports.

"By creating an academic experience that will annually explore how the issues of social justice and sports are expressed in and shape our society, Roger Brown's name will continue to live on and be visible at UD for generations of

students and inspire them to take up the work of building a fairer, more just society.

"Roger Brown — one of the greatest basketball players ever to attend UD and still remembered and highly regarded in the Dayton community 22 years after his death — has been invisible at the University of Dayton. That is neither right nor just."

Brown, a Brooklyn-born student-athlete and rising basketball star at the University of Dayton, was caught up in a national gambling scandal in 1961 for associating with gamblers. Although he was never charged with and there was no indication he was involved in fixing games, Brown was dismissed from the University and barred from playing basketball in the NCAA and NBA. He went on to become a highly accomplished champion in the American Basketball Association with the Indiana Pacers. He was inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in 2013.

After his playing days with the Pacers, Brown remained in Indianapolis where he was an assistant coroner, a member of the Indianapolis city council, a coach with the Pacers and a mentor to Indianapolis Pacers players. He also gave back to the Dayton community, financially supporting Youth Engaged for Success (YES), a program for young people in foster care.

Although he only played at UD on the freshman team due to NCAA regulations at the time, Brown later overcame enormous challenges to reach professional success and is regarded as one of the most talented players to ever wear a UD uniform. His journey was chronicled by filmmaker Ted Green in the PBS documentary ["Undefeated: The Roger Brown Story."](#)

His son, Roger Brown Jr., welcomed the honor and noted that it has been more than 50 years since his father, who died in 1997, played for UD.

"I was ecstatic when I heard about it," Brown said. "This is a perfect time and a perfect opportunity for UD to

acknowledge my father. It's a great gesture and long overdue."

Spina, who acknowledged the University's role in contributing to the hardships Roger Brown faced as a young man who was just starting his life, said Brown deserved better than to be abandoned by the University.

"The residency is intended to be a lasting testament to Mr. Brown's tenacity, excellence, grace and commitment to doing what is right," Spina said. "By revisiting the experience Brown had at UD and acknowledging how the university and our systems fell short, we hope to learn from the experience and grow in our commitment to equality, fairness and social justice.

"This is long overdue, and is intended to begin to make things right with the family, friends, and legacy of Roger Brown by doing something positive, by doing something to promote growth and understanding."

Brown said the residency will be especially welcomed in the West Dayton community, which embraced and lifted up his father in the wake of the allegations: "For those who are still living, it's something they will be very proud of."

One of those supporters, Dayton artist Willis "Bing" Davis said members of the West Dayton community rallied around Brown, helping him through the dark time after he was dismissed from UD. Davis recalled that Arlena and Azariah Smith gave him a place to stay and a loving home atmosphere in which to begin rebuilding his life. Smith, the assistant coach of the AAU team sponsored by Inland Manufacturing, had met Brown the previous year when the UD freshman squad played against local AAU teams.

The Smiths not only gave Roger a home, but Azariah helped him land a job at Inland and welcomed him to the plant's AAU team in the industrial league as well as the Jones Brothers' Funeral Home team, Davis said. During the next few years, the Smiths continued to support and nurture Brown through a number of disappointments, including

being prevented from playing on the 1964 U.S. Olympic team.

Davis said the AAU experience was crucially important for Brown, connecting him with first-rate amateur players to keep his skills sharp, and introducing him to life-long friends who helped him to become part of the Dayton community. At that time, the many AAU teams were on a par with college basketball teams, and the Olympics team drew from both.

So it wasn't surprising that Brown came to the attention of the ABA's Indiana Pacers and was signed as their first player in 1967, where he went on to carve out a brilliant professional career.

Davis, recipient of an honorary UD degree in 1994, who first acquainted Spina with the UD connection to Brown, said the residency far exceeds his hopes for recognition for his old teammate.

"I don't think I could have thought of a better gesture that is positive, educational and cultural. It's just a tremendous concept," Davis said. "UD is not only honoring Roger and his experience and contributions to sports and athletics, but also addressing sports and social justice in a positive way that has meaning so that it's an ongoing tribute.

"It's more than just putting his picture up in the arena or a mention that he was here, but it's contributing to society in a positive way in the name of Roger Brown."

Haygood is a celebrated journalist and author, known for his 2008 *Washington Post* article that was the basis for the film "*The Butler*," directed by Lee Daniels, starring Forest Whitaker and Oprah Winfrey. He has received a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship, a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship, and the 2017 Patrick Henry Fellowship Literary Award.

He is a finalist for the Dayton Literary Peace Prize for his most recent book, *Tigerland*, about the legendary rise of an all-black segregated high school in Columbus, Ohio, that

won two state championships in the year following the assassination of the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. His 2015 book on Thurgood Marshall, *SHOWDOWN*, is currently being developed as a documentary TV miniseries. A native of Columbus and a graduate of Miami University, Haygood also serves as Boadway Distinguished Scholar-in-Residence in Miami's Department of Media, Journalism and Film.

The residency will mark Haygood's third visit to UD. He was the keynote speaker for the University's 2018 MLK Day celebration and returned to campus in October 2018 for the Speaker Series to discuss *Tigerland*.

For Haygood, sports, race and social justice are emblematic of "the nation's ongoing battle with race" and there is no more important topic today.

"From my perspective it's wonderful that President Spina and UD have chosen to honor Brown by creating a visiting writer's residency in his honor," Haygood said. "It's a tribute to an athlete who, after a setback in Dayton, reclaimed his honor through hard work and a fearsome work ethic.

"The University of Dayton seems to be saying to the world that Roger Brown will not be forgotten. And that discussions around the themes of his life — society and sports, the black athlete and civil rights, redemption and triumph — may yield the kind of exploration and understanding that enriches our society as a whole. I think that's a beautiful thing."

For more information or interviews, contact Shawn Robinson, associate director of news and communications, at srobinson@udayton.edu or 937-229-3391.

Share



Topics

📌 President
📌 Athletics

300 College Park
Dayton, Ohio
45469
937-229-1000

info@udayton.edu

Directions

Apply



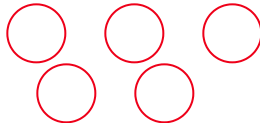
Visit



Request
Info



Give



Careers

Contact

Academic
Calendar

Alumni

Libraries



PORCHES POLICIES REPORT A CONCERN PRIVACY & TERMS NONDISCRIMINATION DIVERSITY